

**MetLife Foundation**

THE PARTNERSHIP<sup>™</sup>  
AT DRUGFREE.ORG

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**THE PARTNERSHIP ATTITUDE**  
**TRACKING STUDY**

**SPONSORED BY METLIFE FOUNDATION**

2011 Parents and Teens  
Full Report

**Released: May 2, 2012**

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Research made possible by a grant from

**MetLife Foundation**

## I. THE PARTNERSHIP AT DRUGFREE.ORG ®

The Partnership at Drugfree.org is a nonprofit organization that exists to help parents and families prevent, intervene in and treat drug and alcohol use by their children.

Bringing together renowned scientists, parent experts, and communications professionals, The Partnership at Drugfree.org translates current research on teen behavior, addiction, and treatment into easy to understand resources at [drugfree.org](http://drugfree.org).

The Partnership at Drugfree.org, in collaboration with the Philadelphia-based [Treatment Research Institute \(TRI\)](#), has recently released the [Six Components of Effective Parenting](#), a new research-based tool to help parents and caregivers prevent adolescent drug and alcohol problems. [Time to Act](#) is a step-by-step guide for parents who believe or are sure that their teens are drinking or using drugs and need to know what to do. Through its “360” suite of community programs, the organization educates parents and concerned citizens at the grassroots level on the risks of methamphetamine, non-medical prescription drug use and other emerging drug threats, and promotes parenting and community practices designed to prevent teen substance abuse.



The organization depends on donations from individuals, corporations, foundations and government. The Partnership at Drugfree.org thanks SAG/AFTRA and the advertising and media industries for their ongoing generosity.

## II. METLIFE FOUNDATION

For over 20 years, MetLife Foundation has provided support for initiatives focusing on substance abuse prevention and education.

Since 1999, the Foundation has collaborated with The Partnership at Drugfree.org on a national public awareness campaign to help parents and caregivers communicate with children about the risks of drug use.

MetLife Foundation was established in 1976 to continue MetLife's longstanding tradition of corporate contributions and community involvement. Their commitment to building a secure future for individuals and communities worldwide is reflected in their dedication to empowering older adults, preparing young people and building livable communities. Since it was established, MetLife Foundation has provided more than \$530 million in grants to nonprofit organizations addressing issues that have a positive impact in their communities.

For more information about the Foundation, visit [www.metlife.org](http://www.metlife.org).

### **III. THE PARTNERSHIP ATTITUDE TRACKING STUDY, SPONSORED BY METLIFE FOUNDATION**

The Partnership Attitude Tracking Study (PATS), sponsored by MetLife Foundation consists of two nationally projectable samples: a survey that measures attitudes and behaviors of parents with children ages 10 to 19 that relate to substance abuse and a teen sample for students in grades nine through twelve. The 2011 survey is the 23<sup>rd</sup> wave of research conducted since 1987. Beginning in 1993 the teen study has been conducted in schools and since 1995 the parents sample has been conducted in homes. Respondent confidentiality is maintained for both studies. Prior to those years the studies were conducted by interviews in central location malls.

Since 2007, deKadt Marketing and Research, Inc. has conducted the in-home parent survey. In 2011, the parents/caregivers sample was 821 and surveying was conducted from August to October, 2011. The margin of error for the parent sample is +/- 3.4 percent.

The Roper Public Affairs Division of GfK Custom Research North America has conducted the teen study since 1993. In 2011, the teen sample was 3,322 and surveying was conducted from March to June, 2011. The margin of error for the teens sample is +/- 3.0 percent. Data points from the 2006 teen survey are omitted, because the investigators believe them to be inaccurate due to sampling error.

Significant differences on tables, charts, or graphs in this report are at the .01 level for the teens sample and at .05 for the parent sample are noted with an asterisk.

**\* = Significant at .01/.05 level**

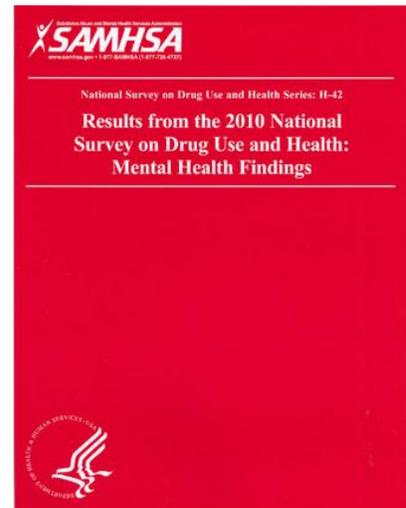
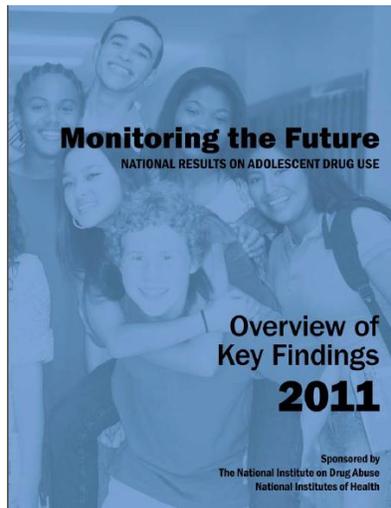
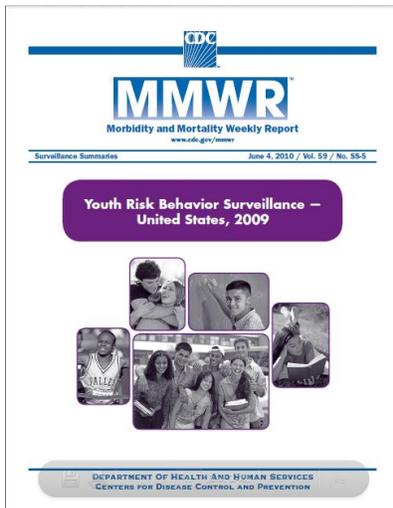
**This year, in order, to show parallel comparisons between parents and teens, only data for parents of 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders will be shown.**

## IV. QUESTIONNAIRE DEVELOPMENT

The Roper Public Affairs Division of GfK Custom Research North America and deKadt Marketing and Research developed the questionnaires in cooperation with The Partnership at Drugfree.org® and MetLife Foundation.

## V. SELF-REPORTED DATA

These studies are based on self-reported data which represent the dominant methodology used in survey research. Many academic and government institutions use self-reporting data when researching sensitive issues, for example, Centers for Disease Control (Youth-At-Risk Surveys), University of Michigan (Monitoring the Future Study), and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (National Survey on Drug Use and Health).



## VI. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### NORMALIZING MARIJUANA USE

New data from the study show that marijuana use is becoming a more acceptable behavior among teens and heavy marijuana use is now at disturbingly high levels.

Nearly half of teens (47 percent) have ever used marijuana – a 21 percent increase since 2008. Additionally, two out of every five teens (39 percent) have tried marijuana in the past year, up from 31 percent in 2008. Past-month use has increased 42 percent from 19 percent in 2008 to 27 percent in 2011. Heavy monthly use (20 or more times) is up 80 percent from 5 percent to 9 percent in 2011. Teen boys are primarily responsible for the increase in usage – their past-month use is up 38 percent and heavy monthly use is up 57 percent since 2008.

Marijuana use is directly associated with usage of other dangerous substances. Teens who report having smoked marijuana in the past year are more likely to have used ecstasy, cocaine/crack, and prescription pain relievers to get high – also within the past year – than teens who have not smoked marijuana. With marijuana use increasing, there is concern that use of other drugs will increase in the near future. While many may not feel that occasional marijuana use has dangerous consequences, smoking heavily during adolescence has serious repercussions on children. Research shows that children who begin using substances during adolescence are much more likely to become addicted later in life than someone who begins using after his or her teenage years

Teens also say they are seeing more peers in school smoking marijuana and more teens (73 percent) report having friends who smoke marijuana regularly (71 percent) – significantly higher than four years ago. Since 2008, there have also been significant declines in teen perceptions that they will lose respect, harm themselves, or mess up their lives if they use marijuana.

## **PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE**

Abuse of prescription medicine remains high but may be plateauing. However, parents do not appear to be contributing to this decline. They are not more likely to communicate the risks of prescription medicine abuse to their kids, they are not safeguarding medicines, and they are increasingly misusing or abusing prescription medications themselves.

Girls are leading the decline in prescription medicine abuse – with levels declining 24 percent since 2009 and 30 percent from last year. Past-year abuse of prescription pain relievers Vicodin or OxyContin seems to have plateaued at about one in every ten adolescents.

More teens are saying that they “strongly disapprove” of their peers using prescription medicines to get high and fewer believe that pain relievers are easy to access.

## **ALARMING SUBSTANCE USE AMONG HISPANIC YOUTH**

Fifty-two percent of Hispanic youth report using illicit drugs in the past year (vs. 42 percent for African-American youth and 40 percent for Caucasian teens). They are also more likely than other teens to have used prescription medicine, Ecstasy or cocaine/crack to get high.

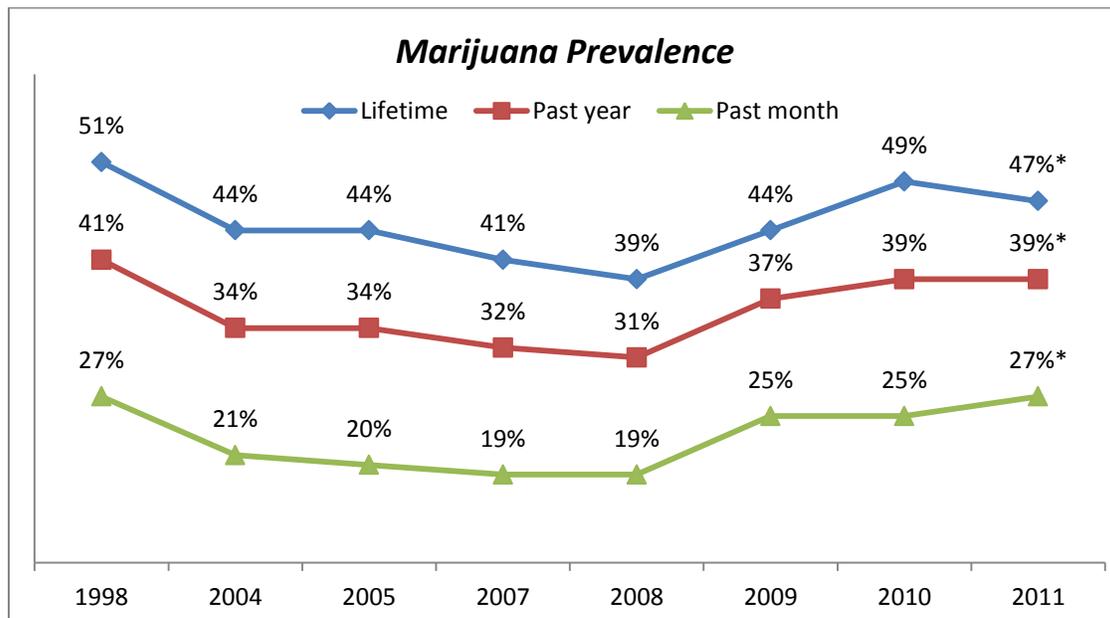
Marijuana use levels are of significant concern among Hispanic youth. Half of Hispanic teens report smoking marijuana in the past year (43 percent more than Caucasian teens and 25 percent more than African-American youth).

Hispanic teens are more likely than other teens to say they have discussed drugs with their parents – BUT Hispanic parents are no more likely than other parents to say they’ve discussed drugs with their kids.

## VII. NORMALIZING MARIJUANA USE

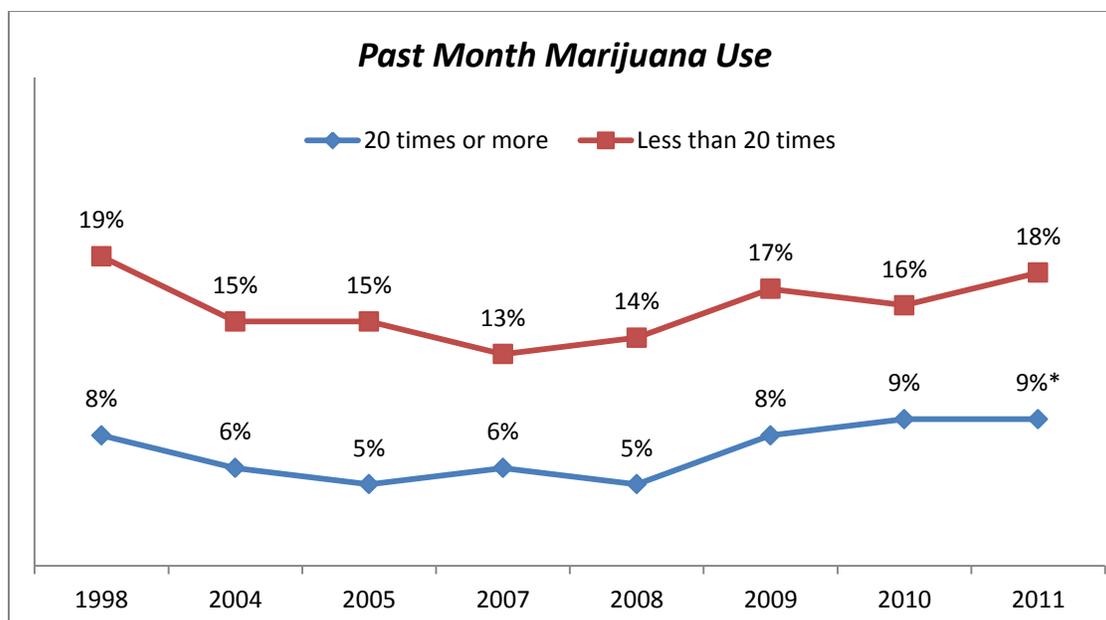
After a decade of declines in teen drug and alcohol use, The Partnership Attitude Tracking Study, sponsored by MetLife Foundation found continued increases in marijuana use among adolescents since 2008.

In 2011, teens in grades nine to twelve were significantly more likely than in 2008 to have smoked marijuana, a trend that continues from last year. Almost half of teens (47 percent) report lifetime trial of marijuana and two out of five (39 percent) report past-year use. More than a fourth (27 percent) report smoking marijuana in the past month, which translates to approximately 4.3 million ninth to twelfth graders who used marijuana. Past month marijuana use has not been this high since 1998.



\*Significantly higher than 2008 levels

Heavy monthly use of marijuana (20 times or more in the past 30 days) has reached alarming levels. Nearly one out of every ten teens (9 percent) say that they used marijuana twenty times or more in the past month. This translates to an 80 percent increase since 2008. The significant reduction of government funded prevention programs in the past few years may well be one factor for these increases in marijuana use.



\*Significantly higher than 2008 levels

The study also shows that teens who use marijuana regularly are using other substances at much higher levels than teens who do not smoke, or smoke less often. They are nearly twice as likely as less frequent smokers to have used pain relievers and cocaine/crack to get high in the past year. They are also nearly 20 times more likely than non-smokers to have used Ecstasy and 16 times more likely to have used meth in the past 12 months. These data show that marijuana use is directly associated with increased use of other dangerous substances, including alcohol and cigarettes.

### **Past-year use of other substances**

<b>At least once (NET)</b>	<b>No marijuana use in past month</b>	<b>Used less than 20 times</b>	<b>Used 20 times or more</b>
Alcohol	45%	84%	83%
Cigarettes ( <i>past month</i> )	11%	44%	59%
Pain relievers	3%	23%	44%
Ecstasy	2%	23%	39%
Cocaine / crack	1%	17%	31%
OTC cough medicine	2%	18%	27%
Huffed / sniffed	4%	15%	20%
Methamphetamine	1%	12%	16%

Boys are driving the increases in marijuana use. Half of teen boys (51 percent) say they have tried marijuana in their lifetime compared to 40 percent of girls – up from 42 percent in 2008 – and more than two out of five (42 percent) say they have smoked marijuana in the past year compared to 33 percent of girls. Additionally, 29 percent of boys report smoking marijuana in the past 30 days compared to 21 percent of girls. One out of every ten boys (11 percent) used marijuana twenty times or more in the past month – up from 7 percent in 2008 – compared to 6 percent of girls.

Not surprisingly, this growth in prevalence is increasing teen perceptions of peers who are smoking. They are seeing more peers in school who smoke marijuana – only 26 percent now agree that in their school “most teens don’t smoke marijuana” (down from 37 percent in 2008). Additionally, seven in ten teens (71 percent) report having at least a few friends who smoke marijuana regularly (up from 64 percent in 2008). Teen social disapproval remained stable year-to-year, with 61 percent of adolescents saying they disapprove of their peers using marijuana.

Adolescents are seeing less long-term risk in using marijuana. Since 2008, there have been declines in their perceptions that they will lose respect, harm themselves, or mess up their lives if they use marijuana. The only risk that remains unchanged is the fear of upsetting their parents. Additionally, the data found that in 2011 only about half of teens (51 percent) believe that there is “great risk” in using marijuana, down from 61 percent in 2005.

### **Perceived Risks of Using Marijuana**

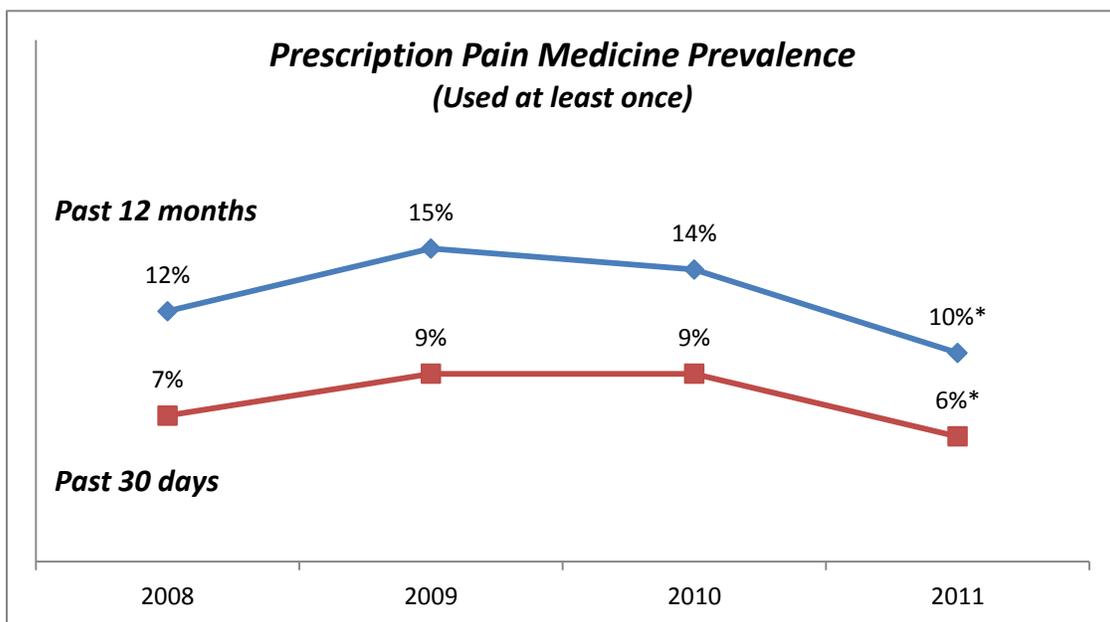
<b>Top 2 Box – Great / Moderate risk</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>
Upsetting their parents	86%	85%	87%	87%
Losing the respect of family / friends	85%	80%	83%	81%*
Putting themselves or others in danger	84%	79%	75%	78%*
Messing up their lives	82%	75%	72%	76%*
Making the problem worse	82%	76%	72%	75%*
Losing control of themselves	82%	76%	73%	74%*
Getting depressed	73%	67%	60%	63%*

*\* Significantly lower than 2008 levels*

The media are also playing a key role in teens' perceptions that using marijuana is acceptable. Nearly half (45 percent) agree that the music they listen to "makes marijuana seem cool" (up from 34 percent in 2008). And, close to half (47 percent) also agree that "movies and TV shows make drugs seem like an ok thing to do" (up from 37 percent in 2008).

## VIII. PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE

Abuse of prescription medicine remains high, but there are signs that it may be plateauing. Close to one in five teens (17 percent) say they have used a prescription medicine at least once in their lifetime to get high or change their mood. This is slightly, although not significantly, down from 22 percent in 2010 and from 20 percent in 2009. Use of prescription pain medicines, specifically Vicodin or OxyContin, is trending downward. One out of ten teens reports using pain medication to get high in the past year and six percent say they used in the past 30 days – down significantly from 2009 levels. Additionally, one in ten teens (12 percent) reports lifetime use of over-the-counter (OTC) cough or cold medicines to get high.



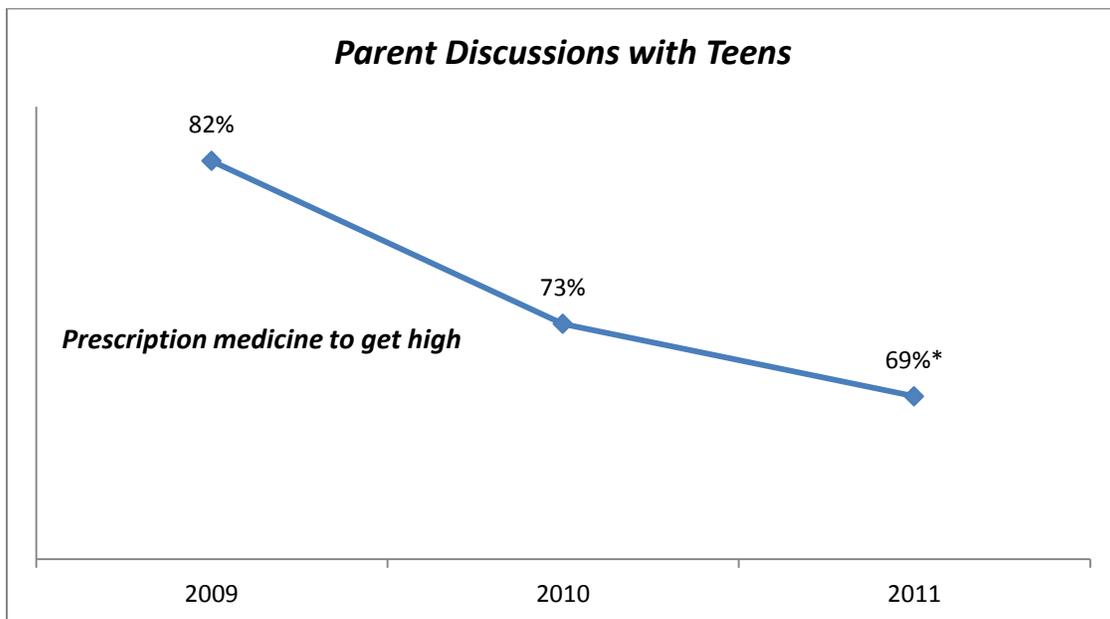
*\*Significantly lower than 2009 levels*

Much of this flattening can be attributed to a reduction in use by girls. This year, 16 percent of girls reported ever using a prescription medicine to get high or alter their mood. This is significantly down from 2009 (21 percent) and 2010 (23 percent). It will be important to keep an eye on whether this trend continues into 2012. Usage among boys remained flat during the same time periods (20 percent in 2009, 22 percent in 2010, and 18 percent in 2011).

It is important to note that the negative consequences of prescription medicine abuse remain extensive and troubling. Emergency room visits as a result of prescription medications increased 45 percent between 2004 and 2009 among children under 20 years of age<sup>1</sup>. Admissions to treatment for prescription medicine abuse among adolescents have also increased and deaths caused by drug overdoses, led by prescription medicines, now outnumber traffic fatalities in the United States<sup>2</sup>.

The slowing down of prescription medicine abuse may be partly explained by an increase in social disapproval among teens. Nearly three out five teens (58 percent) now say that they “strongly disapprove” of their peers using prescription medication to get high. This is a significant increase from 2010 numbers where about half of teens said the same (52 percent). Historically, social disapproval and perception of risk have been most closely correlated with changes in drug prevalence among teens. When social disapproval or perception of risk increases, usage of that drug usually declines.

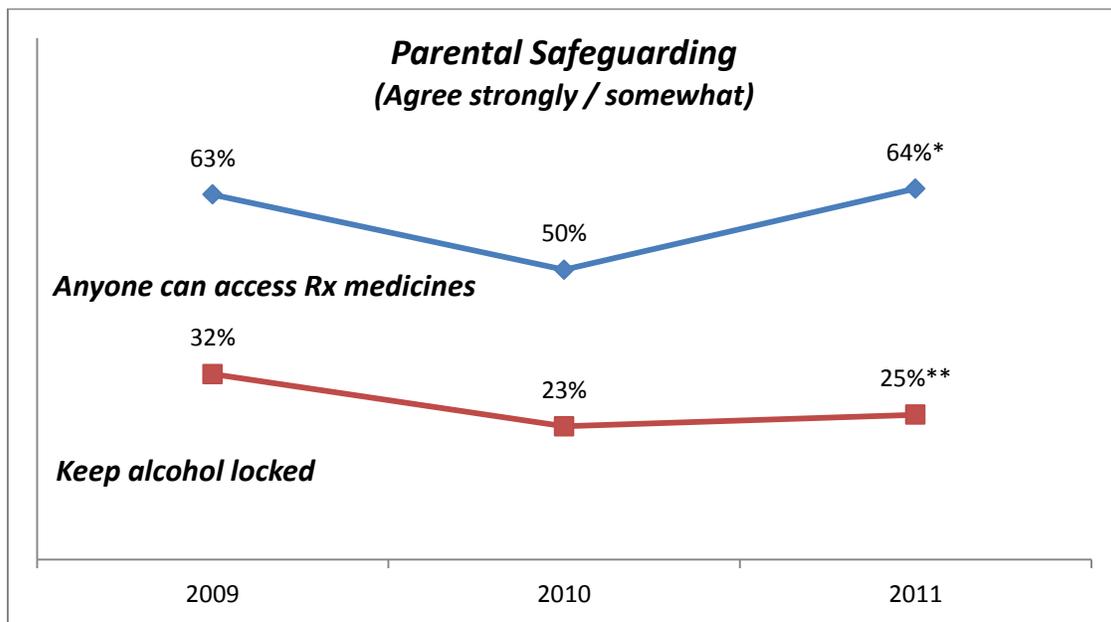
One source of concern is that parents do not appear to be playing a strong preventive role with their children. Slightly over two-thirds (69 percent) of parents of ninth through twelfth graders say they have ever had a discussion with their children about prescription medicine to get high. This is down from 82 percent in 2009 – a 16 percent decline.



*\*Significantly lower than 2009 and 2010 levels*

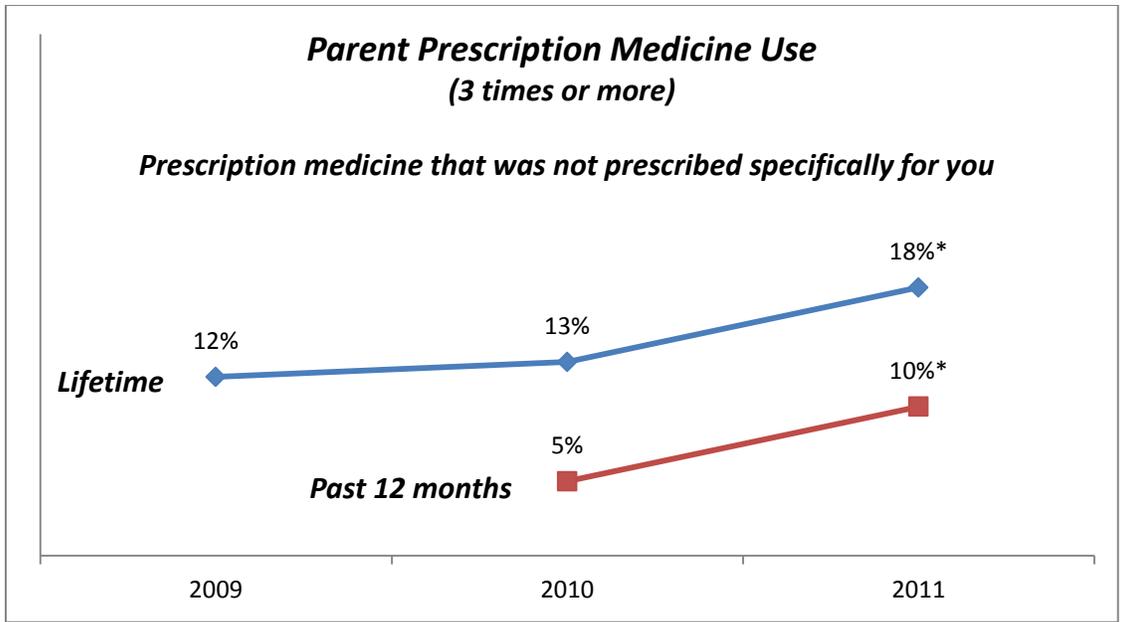
There is evidence that parent-child communication is vital in keeping teens away from drugs, especially prescription medicine. Teens that report learning a lot from their parents about the risks of drugs are half as likely as those who learn nothing from parents to have ever used prescription medicines to get high, but only 16 percent say they have discussed prescription medicine with their parents in the past year.

Parents are also taking less care to safeguard dangerous substances in their homes. Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) agree that anyone in the house can access the medicine cabinet where prescription medicines are kept – up from 50 percent in 2010. Only a quarter of parents also agree that they keep alcohol locked in a cabinet at home – down from 32 percent in 2009.



*\*Significantly higher than 2010 levels/ \*\*Significantly lower than 2009 levels*

Furthermore, parents are also increasingly misusing or abusing prescription medications themselves. Nearly one out every five parents (18 percent) reports using a prescription medicine that was not prescribed to them three times or more in their lifetime. This is up from 12 percent in 2009 – a 40 percent increase. Fifteen percent of parents say they’ve used a prescription medicine not prescribed for them at least once in the past year, a 25 percent increase from 2010 (first time the question was asked) to 2011. More frequent past-year misuse of prescription medicines (three times or more) is up 50 percent from 2010 from 5 percent of parents to 10 percent in 2011.



*\*Significantly higher than 2009 and 2010 levels*

## IX. ALARMING SUBSTANCE USE AMONG HISPANIC YOUTH

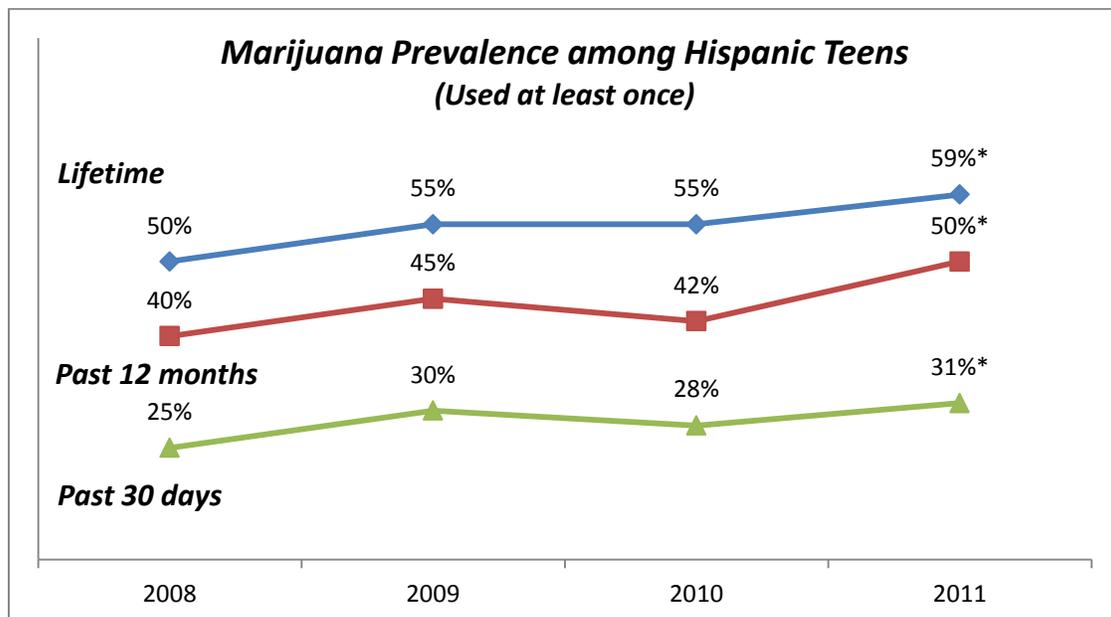
Over half of Hispanic teens (54 percent) say that they have used an illicit drug in the past year. This is much higher than Caucasian (39 percent) or African American teens (42 percent). Overall drug use is also up 20 percent among Hispanic youth, a significant increase from 2008.

### Drugs Use by Ethnicity

	Caucasian	African-American	Hispanic
<b>Lifetime abuse of Rx medicine</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>23%*</b>
<b>Past-year use of illicit drugs</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>54%*</b>
Marijuana	35%	40%	50%*
Ecstasy	6%	9%	15%*
Cocaine / crack	4%	5%	12%*
<b>Past-year use of alcohol</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>62%*</b>

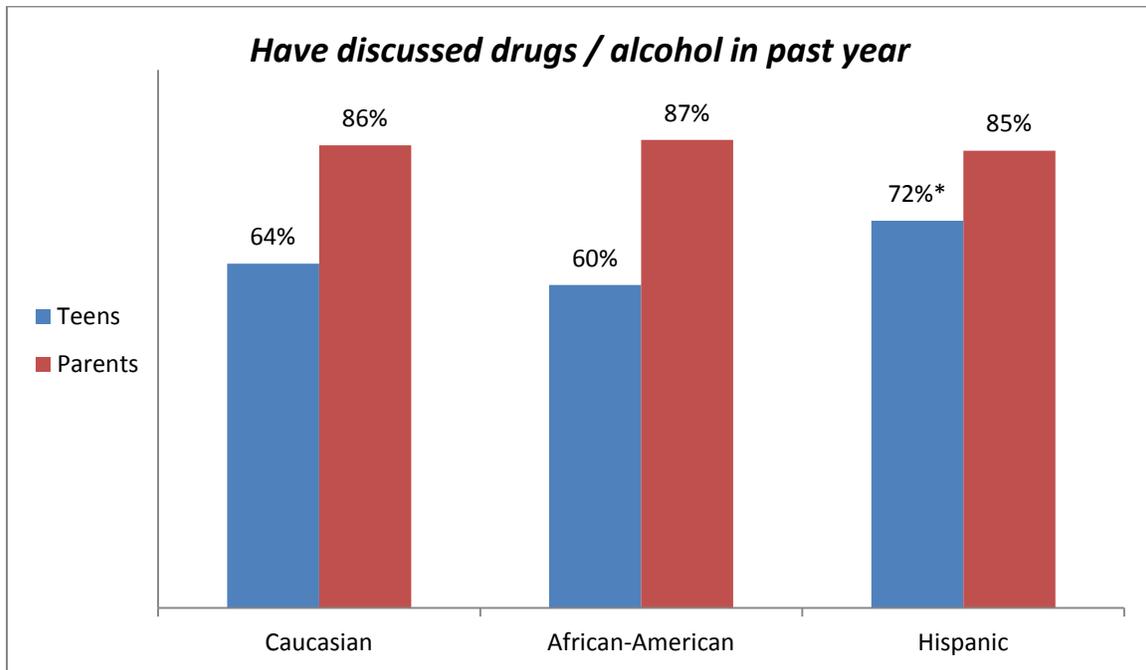
*\*Significantly higher than Caucasian or African-American teens*

Of particular concern is Hispanic teens' marijuana usage which has been steadily increasing since 2008. In 2011, half of Hispanic adolescents say they smoked marijuana in the past year and a third used in the past 30 days. This represents a 25 percent increase in past-year use and a 24 percent increase in past month use since 2008.



*\*Significantly higher than 2008 levels*

Interestingly, Hispanic teens are more likely than Caucasian or African-American adolescents to say that their parents have discussed drugs with them in the past year. However, increasing drug use among Hispanic teens suggests that Hispanic parents are less effective than their Caucasian or African-American counterparts when communicating the risks of drugs to their children. It is possible that Hispanic parents do not have the tools or information necessary to give these talks more preventive value.



*\*Significantly higher than Caucasian and African-American teens*

## X. IMPLICATIONS

The findings from The Partnership Attitude Tracking Study, sponsored by MetLife Foundation are of critical importance to parents, caregivers and those in positions to influence teens – such as teachers and coaches. With the increasingly mixed messages about the risks of marijuana in the media, it is often difficult for parents to clearly understand how dangerous marijuana can be for their teenagers, especially if used heavily. Large surges in marijuana use can be a predictor of other dangerous behaviors, including heavy use of “hard drugs” like cocaine and ecstasy, as well as alcohol and cigarettes. Marijuana remains the primary drug leading to adolescent treatment admissions. In 2009, 86 percent of adolescent treatment admissions involved marijuana as the primary or secondary substance of abuse<sup>3</sup>.

While many may not feel that occasional marijuana use has dangerous consequences, smoking heavily during adolescence has serious repercussions on children. It is a fact that teens’ brains are still developing and are more easily harmed by drugs and alcohol than adult brains; therefore, it is important to keep children from using drugs or alcohol, especially before the age of 18. One in four teens who start using drugs, alcohol or tobacco before the age of 18 will likely suffer significant harm from their use. Additionally, children who begin using these substances during adolescence are much more likely to become addicted later in life than someone who begins using after his or her teenage years.

Today, teens are exposed to a large variety of substances, like prescription medicines and synthetic drugs, such as K2/Spice and bath salts. Despite some signs that prescription drug abuse is plateauing, medication abuse remains the number one cause of drug overdoses. Furthermore, emergency room visits for prescription drug overdose and treatment admissions for prescription drug abuse have increased yearly. Emergency room visits for new substances, such as Spice (synthetic marijuana) and bath salts have also been increasing in the past few years. Parents can access The Partnership at Drugfree.org [drug guide](#) – a

comprehensive and up-to-date source of drug information, including drug descriptions, slang terms, short term and long term effects, images, federal classifications and more – to learn more about the drugs that their children are exposed to.

Some teens are more vulnerable to drug and alcohol addiction than others, making it even more important for parents to prevent their teens from using drugs or alcohol – even recreationally or experimentally. Parents and other influencers play a crucial role in influencing teens to live drug-free lives. Children who learn a lot about the risks of drugs from a caregiver or from school programs are less likely to use drugs throughout their adolescence. It is vital for parents to learn their children’s risk factors so that they are better prepared to prevent their drug use. Teens who have a family history of substance abuse or who suffer from depression or ADHD have a much greater chance of developing a drug or alcohol problem. The Partnership at Drugfree.org’s new [\*\*Six Components of Effective Parenting\*\*](#) is a good starting point for parents and caregivers to begin educating themselves on how to prevent their children’s substance use.

Parents and caregivers are role models for their children and as such they must be cautious of their own misuse of substances, especially those that are found in the home. By doing this, they are setting a healthy example and can inspire their children to make smart, drug-free choices. The Partnership at Drugfree.org exists to provide guidance to parents regarding their children and substance use – thanks to the generous sponsorship of organizations like MetLife Foundation. You can find all our resources online at [\*\*drugfree.org\*\*](#).

The Partnership at Drugfree.org encourages and motivates parents of children who are using drugs or alcohol to take action as soon as they suspect or know their child is using. The [\*\*Parents Toll-Free Helpline \(855-DRUG-FREE\)\*\*](#) is a nationwide support service that offers assistance to parents and other primary caregivers who want to talk to a licensed professional about their child’s

substance use. Here parents can also obtain information about treatment options for an adolescent in need.

Our Spanish-language site, [\*Habla Con Tus Hijos\*](#), is specially tailored to address the unique challenges the Hispanic community faces in preventing drug use among adolescents. It is especially important now, with the disproportionate increase in drug use among Hispanic youth, that parents educate themselves about how to help their children. By providing extensive Spanish-language resources on preventing, intervening and finding treatment for a child, The Partnership at Drugfree.org is giving Hispanic parents and caregivers the opportunity to access the information in their preferred language.

Developed in collaboration with scientists from the Treatment Research Institute, [\*Time to Act\*](#) offers step-by-step advice and compassionate guidance from substance abuse experts, family therapists, scientists and fellow parents to help guide families through the process of understanding drug and alcohol use, confronting a child, setting boundaries, and seeking outside help.

[\*Time to Get Help\*](#) provides science-based guidance on how to find appropriate help for a child who is using drugs or drinking, and offers parents the chance to interact online with other parents and with experts to get the information and support they need.

The Parents section of The Partnership at Drugfree.org website is made possible by a generous grant from MetLife Foundation.

## XI. SOURCES

- <sup>1</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. *Drug Abuse Warning Network: Detailed Tables: National Estimates, Drug-Related Emergency Department Visits for 2004–2009*. Rockville, MD, December 28, 2010.
- <sup>2</sup> CDC/NCHS, National Vital Statistics System
- <sup>3</sup> Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS). Data received through 11.03.10.